The Reaction of British Methodism to
the Civil War and Reconstruction in America

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Ever since the arrival of John Wesley's first itinerant preachers to America in the 1760's, British Methodists had maintained an abiding interest in the growth and development of American society and institutions. Interest in the American scene was perhaps never more intense than during the decade of the 1860s.

English Methodists were cognizant of the widespread dissemination of secessionist propaganda in the autumn of 1860 and of the political activities of secessionist politicians. However, British churchmen minimized the import of the secessionist thrust in the cotton-producing states. The religious press assumed that the threats of secession would cease following the presidential election. It was explained that the slave states could not secede without precipitating a civil war. Churchmen believed that there were several factors which would deter southerners from seceding and risking war. It was asserted that the southern states did not possess adequate resources to wage a successful war against the rest of the states. It was also claimed that the political leaders of the south knew that if they attempted to form a separate slave-holding republic they would have "no friends or allies" anywhere in the world. Another factor which Britons believed would influence southerners to refrain from actions which would result in war was their fear that if war began the slaves would "rise up in servile revolt".

British Methodists did not perceive that the election of Abraham Lincoln as President of the United States was cause for precipitate action by the southern states. It was noted that although Lincoln was a man of "northern principles" he was not an abolitionist. Church spokesmen explained that he had no intention or wish to abolish slavery in the southern states, he only wanted to

prevent the expansion of slavery into new territories.2

Shortly before the convening of the South Carolina state convention which adopted the first secession ordinance, Methodist spokesmen continued to feel that the union would not be disrupted. It was surmised that "when matters have been carried as far as is safe, and the Republic has been brought to the brink of disruption and... civil war" the nationalistic sentiments of the southern people would prevail; mediation talks would begin and a compromise accord reached which would preserve the union.3

The political expectations of British Methodists were shattered by the secession of South Carolina. The withdrawal of that state from the union was termed "a day of dark memory," and it was declared that there would be no joy in England over the dissolution of the American republic. The secession of South Carolina stimulated a more realistic appraisal of American affairs by the Methodist press in England. It was now speculated that other states would follow the example of South Carolina.4

In the opening months of 1861 other slave states adopted secession ordinances and representatives from these states met in convention, drafted a constitution and organized a government for the Confederate States of America. Methodist spokesmen in Britain were convinced that the south was pursuing an irrational policy. Southern politicians were attempting to establish a nation upon the "cornerstone" of human slavery. They were embarked on a course of action which churchmen described as being "incapable of justification." Primary blame for the disruption of the union was placed on slave holding politicians and the lame duck president, James Buchanan. Buchanan was described as the incompetent agent of the slave [Democratic] party.5

Throughout the years of the civil war churchmen reiterated the conviction that southern political leaders were wholly responsible for secession. It was explained that for decades the southern interests had been dominant in the Federal government. Southern influence on the policies of the national government had been

3. The Watchman, December 5, 1860.
4. Ibid., January 9, 1861.
5. Ibid., January 9, June 5, August 8, 1861.
manifested in the opening of new territory to slavery and in the enactment of more stringent fugitive slave laws. It was claimed that the south lost its position of dominant influence in the election of 1860, when a president was elected without receiving a single electoral vote from the region. This loss of influence, although resulting from "fair and constitutional means," precipitated a "furious and insolent" reaction from many in the south. Politicians in the area sought to destroy the union even though the southern states had not been deprived of a single constitutional right by the Federal government.6

Churchmen had maintained that peaceful secession was unlikely and that efforts to disrupt the union would result in the "horrors of war" and "desolation." However, in the spring and summer of 1861, Methodist spokesmen urged Christians in Britain to pray for "our brethren in America." To pray that Almighty God would still their passions, grant them wisdom, and prevent a fratricidal war. Some suggested that the southern states should be permitted to go their "sinful and rebellious way" rather than trying to maintain the union by force of arms.7

Any hopes which churchmen nourished that secession might be peaceful were illusory and war erupted in the spring of 1861. Blame or responsibility for the war was placed upon the south and its political leaders. It was charged that they were guilty of seizing Federal property, taking up arms and beginning the rebellion against the national government. Southerners were accused of being "altogether in the wrong, morally, socially, and politically." The south drew the sword, it was declared, to preserve and extend "the foul sin of slavery." The south was portrayed as fighting "for the freedom to enslave," for freedom to "tear wife from husband and mother from child," for the freedom to "make it legal" to torture and kill a black father for defending his outraged daughter, for the freedom to "make it legal" for a white father to sell his own child.8

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7. The Watchman, December 5, 1860, January 23, May 29, June 5, August 8, 1861.

At the beginning of the American war the Methodist press exclaimed that the north would receive the sympathy and moral support of the British people. It was explained that the Federal government and the north were fighting to preserve the “integral existence” of the United States and to prevent the dismemberment of its constituent parts. To fight for the preservation of a great nation, it was claimed, was more laudable than waging war for the purpose of preserving and extending slavery. Sympathy for northern aims, however, was questioned by some who maintained that the north was fighting for empire rather than to exterminate the evils of human slavery.

During the first year of the war the Methodist spokesmen voiced confidence that the north would “be powerful enough” and succeed in restoring the union through military force. Following Federal military victories in Tennessee and at New Orleans in early 1862, one church newspaper announced, “our best wishes are for the submission of the Confederates and the success of the Unionists.” Confidence was expressed that the Federal armies would soon conquer the slave states and restore them to the union; the United States would then become a “free, homogeneous... Republic.” On one occasion the meeting of the Methodist Conference offered prayers for an ending of the strife in America, for the restoration of the union, and for the continued development of the republic.

However, as the war was prolonged some British observers expressed doubts that force of arms could restore the union. In the spring of 1863, one Methodist spokesman surmised that the American republic could not be reunited through warfare and he voiced the hope that some form of compromise might be agreed upon by the belligerents which would acknowledge a divided America. Another opined that “the restoration of the union seems well nigh impossible” and he asked “may we not indulge the hope that a peace on the basis of separation is not far distant?” There was

some speculation among churchmen that if an accord was not reached in America the United States might experience further disruption and become "a loose connection of states" such as those of Germany. Anti-war sentiment in the Ohio and Mississippi valley area of the mid-west together with "disgust" over Federal military losses in Virginia in 1862 and early 1863, some felt, might prompt the "states of the upper Mississippi valley" and those on the Pacific coast to form confederations and establish governments independent of the one at Washington.\textsuperscript{13}

When the war was extended some Methodist observers ventured the opinion that a divided America would be welcomed by many in Europe. It was explained that a divided United States would result in a weaker nation and therefore it would create less of a potential threat to world peace than an American empire which extended from the Atlantic to the Pacific and from the Gulf of Mexico to Canada. Some believed that an American state of these proportions would unduly upset the power structure in the world and constitute a threat to peace and security. It was acknowledged that some in England had "no great desire" to have the union restored.\textsuperscript{14}

Although English Methodists might have held various opinions about the feasibility of restoring the American union, they were unanimous in their opinion concerning slavery. Ever since the days of John Wesley and Thomas Coke English Methodists had been among the more articulate opponents of slavery and the slave trade. Slavery was described as "the execrable sum of all villanies." It was a sin which offended two great Christian principles: the Golden Rule and the injunction to love one's neighbor. American slavery was described as being "the worst type"; it was declared that it was more inhumane or brutal than any other system of bondage in recorded history. It was worse than the type of slavery practiced by the ancient Egyptians, Greeks, or Romans. Some churchmen believed that the civil war was a manifestation of God's wrath upon the American people "for the cruel part they had taken in holding

\textsuperscript{13} The Bible Christian Magazine, June, 1863, p. 242; The Watchman, February 18, March 4, August 26, 1863, May 25, November 24, 1864, January 11, 1865.

\textsuperscript{14} The Watchman, August 26, 1863; The Bible Christian Magazine, March, 1863, p. 119, November, 1864, p. 424.
millions of human beings in bondage."15

Slavery, it was claimed, was the root cause of the American conflict. "Without this disturbing element" in American politics, churchmen exclaimed, the United States would be a great commonwealth, the wonder and admiration of the world.16 Although the civil war was not initially a conflict to free the slaves, British churchmen hoped that emancipation would be one of the results of the war. Throughout the years of hostilities British Methodists were urged to pray for peace in America and for the abolition of slavery. Federal policies commenced during the war, which were viewed as being antislavery in nature, were accorded a favorable reception by ecclesiastics.17

In the spring and summer of 1861, Federal commander Benjamin F. Butler designated run-away slaves who sought refuge in areas under his jurisdiction as "contraband" and refused to return them to slave state personnel or to slave owners. The Federal government did not rescind or reprimand Butler for this action. Methodist observers in England expressed approval of this policy and exclaimed that this marked "the beginning of a policy which would result in the end of slavery."18 In 1862 when the Federal government decided to arm Negro volunteers and use them as soldiers church spokesmen ventured the opinion that the use of blacks might prolong the war by strengthening resistance of the south. However, it was explained that Negroes had every right "to fight for liberty," one of the inalienable rights of man. Churchmen deplored the threats of the Confederate government to treat

17. Ibid., December, 1861, p. 1121, December, 1864, p. 1124; The watchman, May 29, October 2, 1861; Minutes of the Methodist Conferences, volume XV [1862], p. 337, [1863], p. 549; Minutes of the Methodist Conferences, volume XVI [1864], p. 147; Minutes of the 67th Annual Conference of the New Methodist Connexion, Composed of Ministers and Lay Representatives, Held at Leeds, May 25, 1863 (William Cooke: London, n.d.), p. 7.
18. The Watchman, June 12, 1861.
captured black soldiers and their officers as dangerous fugitives and cautioned that any attempts to deal with them as anything other than legitimate prisoners of war would bring "disgrace and irretrievable ruin" to the south.19

In 1862 Congress enacted legislation to provide for the emancipation of slaves in the District of Columbia. Methodist spokesmen declared that this was a part of the "design of an all-wise Ruler" for the "downfall of slavery." Lincoln's suggestion this same year of a program for the compensated emancipation of slaves in the border states was described as just and motivated by "humanity and religion."20 News of the forthcoming Emancipation Proclamation reached England in the fall of 1862. Although the proclamation was described as being "not all that the friends of the Negro could wish," it was recognized that it gave assurance that slavery would not exist after the war.21 In 1863-64 the legislative bodies in various border states discussed emancipation proposals. It was surmised that Missouri would shortly free all slaves in that state and the Methodist press claimed that over 600,000 slaves in America had been freed by the end of December, 1863. Some in Britain exclaimed that abolitionism was becoming synonymous with patriotism in America.22

When the war ended in the spring of 1865, emancipation was termed the one "grand compensation for the carnage and misery" of war. By this date most Methodist spokesmen declared that the war had been "Providential." It had been the divine will that slavery be extirpated by a terrible war. It was believed that a "baptism of blood" had been necessary to eradicate the horrible evil of slavery.23

The economic hardships and suffering which accompanied the civil war were not limited to America. Prior to 1860 British textile

22. The Watchman, December 9, 1863.
23. Wesleyan Methodist Magazine, February, 1863, p. 161; The Watchman, July 30, 1863; The Bible Christian Magazine, May, 1862, p. 242. In the summer of 1861 one editor expressed the hope that the Americans could agree on a program of compensated emancipation for the slaves. It would be cheaper, more practical, and much more humane than warfare, see The Watchman, August 14, 1861.
manufacturers had obtained approximately 75% of their cotton from the southern states. Because of the war and the blockade there developed a ‘cotton famine’ in England and thousands of textile workers joined the ranks of the unemployed. Churchmen explained that the economic privations which afflicted the British at this time were manifestations of the judgment of Almighty God. It was claimed that England had been “indifferent to the wrongs of four million...human beings” who had prepared the cotton which enriched many Englishmen. Methodist spokesmen asked Britons to humble themselves and pray to God that He might destroy the “cause of our national disasters,” American slavery.  

Churchmen declared that British guilt or responsibility for American slavery was not limited to the English demand for cotton. It was noted that England had introduced slavery into America and that many Englishmen had been active in the colonial slave trade. The misery and suffering experienced by the manufacturing districts of Lancashire during the war were described as “our quota of the emancipation price of the American slaves.”

During the cotton shortage Methodist spokesmen urged Englishmen to cultivate more cotton in India, Australia, and the West Indies and to obtain additional cotton from Africa, Brazil, and Mexico. It was claimed that English manufacturers had been short-sighted in becoming almost wholly dependent upon one source for their cotton. During the war one Methodist newspaper declared “if the American war ended tomorrow we must obtain our cotton from elsewhere and never again become dependent upon the American monopoly.” In the closing year of the war, when non-American sources of cotton were becoming more plentiful, one churchman exclaimed that one of the beneficial results of the war was “it had made England independent of American cotton.” Cotton from Egypt, India, and the West Indies had made it possible for many of


the mills in Lancashire to resume operations.26

At the time of the cotton shortage and massive unemployment churchmen suggested that the British government, charitable organizations, and local congregations undertake programs to provide relief for the needy and hungry. In 1862 the Methodist Conference directed that special "collections be made in all chapels" for the relief of "our fellow countrymen now suffering distress in the manufacturing districts." In 1863 the Methodist press asked collections be taken "throughout Methodism" to help alleviate the suffering of unemployed textile laborers. These appeals received a favorable response and from September, 1862, to August, 1863, over twenty-five thousand and five hundred pounds were contributed to aid the needy.27

Throughout the war Methodist spokesmen were firm supporters of the British government's policy of neutrality toward the American belligerents. A month before the government announced its policy churchmen declared "public opinion in England has no sympathy with the slave confederation," and that it would be morally wrong for England to offer recognition or support to the Confederacy.28 Churchmen expressed criticism of the government only on those occasions when it appeared that the government was straying from a position of neutrality.

In 1862 there was some speculation about possible British and French intervention in the American war and a few members of Parliament sought to alter the government's policy of neutrality. Churchmen contended that England should maintain its current position. William S. Lindsey's suggestion in the House of Commons that England recognize the Confederacy was described as "preposterous" and "morally unacceptable."29 During the cotton shortage some in England suggested the possibility of British intervention to obtain cotton. Methodist spokesmen were vigorously opposed to any such effort. They maintained that although the lack

27. The Wesleyan Methodist Magazine, October, 1862, pp. 927-928; The Watchman, February 18, 1863; Minutes of the Methodist Conferences, volume XV [1862], 324, [1863], p. 627.
29. The Watchman, January 1, June 18, 25, 1862.
of cotton caused deprivation in England, the British people "must practice reserve" and "adhere to the wise policy" of neutrality. It was asserted that those who wished England to risk war with the United States by forcing the blockade to obtain cotton were not cognizant of the best interests of the nation — were not true Englishmen. It was explained that England needed American wheat and flour; tension and conflict with the United States, it was noted, could create a bread famine in England which would be much worse than the loss of cotton.30

In 1863 there were additional rumors about the possibility of European powers, especially France, intervening in American affairs. British churchmen maintained that even if the French government recognized the Confederacy England, "with her traditional championship of the Negro," could never recognize a state whose cornerstone was slavery.31 On one occasion a religious editor speculated that the only possibility of the Confederacy gaining recognition by Britain would be for the south to implement a program of emancipation.32

Although British Methodists were ardent supporters of the government's policy of neutrality, they often criticized the government for actions which churchmen considered lax or not adhering to a thoroughly neutral position. The British government was chided for sending approximately 3,000 troops to Canada in the summer of 1861. It was charged that this was "too few" to adequately protect the vast Canadian frontier but that they were "enough to give offense" to the American government, which might interpret it as a provocation.33

During the war British shipbuilders constructed a number of blockade runners, warships, and other vessels for southerners.34 Methodist spokesmen deplored these activities and requested the British government take a firm policy of opposition to the con-

32. The Watchman, May 27, 1863.
33. Ibid., July 10, 1861.
34. A recent study estimates that over 1200 ships were acquired by the Confederacy from British shipbuilders during the war. See Richard I. Lester, Confederate Finance and Purchasing in Great Britain (University Press of Virginia: Charlottesville, 1975), p. 197.
construction of ships for belligerents. The construction of the 'Alabama,' the 'Alexandra,' and other warships for the Confederacy was described as "a reproach" to the English character and a violation of the country's Foreign Enlistment Act. It was declared that the government should "stop the disgraceful fitting out of armed ships to destroy the commerce of a nation with which we profess to be on terms of amity." Churchmen also requested that the government prevent the exportation of contraband consigned for the south and prohibit agents of either belligerent enlisting British nationals for military service in America. It was explained that unless such practices were prohibited they would create tensions, arouse passions, and increase the risk of war between "two great and kindered nations."35

In 1862 Confederate agents negotiated an arrangement with the Laird shipbuilding firm at Birkenhead for the construction of several rams. These were iron clad warships designed to force the Federal blockade of southern ports. Construction on these ships was soon discovered by agents of the United States government and the American minister in London, Charles F. Adams, protested their construction and sought to have the British government halt work on them and prevent their delivery to Confederate personnel. During the months of diplomatic negotiations which resolved the issue, the Methodist press urged the government to take forceful action and prevent delivery of the rams to the Confederacy. It was exclaimed that "common sense" could determine that their construction was a violation of the Foreign Enlistment Act and of British neutrality.36

Perhaps the most critical period in British-American relations occurred in the winter of 1861-62. In the fall of 1861 the Confederate government decided to send James Mason and John Slidell as diplomatic agents to England and France. It was hoped that these men would effectively present the Confederate cause and gain diplomatic recognition and material assistance for the south. These agents were successful in eluding the blockade and reaching Havana, Cuba. From there they took passage aboard the British
steamer, Trent, for Europe. Shortly after departing Havana a United States warship, the San Jacinto, stopped the Trent, removed Mason and Slidell and permitted the Trent to continue. Many in England were aroused by this “violation of British rights.” Some proclaimed the action of the San Jacinto constituted an affront to the British government and demanded that the American government apologize for the behavior of the ship’s crew. At this period of diplomatic crisis Methodist spokesmen urged that the British public and government maintain a “tolerant attitude” toward the United States. They declared that it would be a “serious mistake” for England to go to war over the removal of the Confederate agents. It was suggested that the American government might follow the example of Great Britain in 1809, when a British warship fired into the American vessel, ‘Chesapeak’, stopped it and removed some English seamen. It was recalled that the British government quickly disavowed this act, reprimanded the commander of the British ship, and offered reparations to the American government.37

It was noted that there was “enough vagueness and uncertainty in international law to afford the American government a loop-hole of escape” from the alternative of a war with England. Churchmen were confident that the diplomats and “Providence would rescue [England] from the misery of a war with the United States and the degredation” which would result from an alliance with the slave holding south. The Trent crisis ended after about six weeks when the Federal government released the diplomats and permitted them to resume their journey to Europe. The religious press announced that the agents would soon arrive in England but expressed hope that their arrival would be unnoticed and that the British public would accord them “no reception at all.”38

When the war ended in the spring of 1865 the Methodist Conference sent a message to the General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church in the United States of America. It announced “we rejoice” with you and congratulate you on the wonderful interposition with God’s good providence in abolishing

slavery in America and in preserving the republic. Methodist spokesmen had earlier expressed confidence that Lincoln would be able to reunite the country. His proclamation of amnesty, issued in December, 1863, had elicited favorable comment from the religious press. It was noted that the exceptions designated in the proclamation — those individuals who had held high political and military positions in the Confederacy and those who had left Federal positions to aid the rebellion — could be severe. However, it was believed that the Lincoln government would pursue a tolerant or moderate policy toward southerners and overall Lincoln’s proclamation was described as “judicious.”

The assassination of President Lincoln shortly after the collapse of the Confederacy, was described as a “horrible crime.” Churchmen exclaimed that news of his death was received by all in England “with deepest regret.” The murder of the president removed from the American scene a man of “wisdom, mildness, patience, and firmness.” The loss of his leadership caused apprehension among churchmen who declared “we trust that Providence” will restore peace and harmony in America and maintain freedom for the Negroes.

Methodist interest in post-war America was concerned primarily with the status of the former slaves and their rights. The controversy which developed between the executive and legislative branches of the Federal government did not greatly concern foreign observers. When Andrew Johnson succeeded to the presidency some apprehension was expressed about his “fitness” for the office. It was claimed that he had been inebriated at Lincoln’s second inaugural and he had made harsh statements about punishment for traitors. However, Johnson’s moderate or non-vindicative policies toward the south, reflected in his refusal to make a “martyr” of Jefferson Davis, his generous use of the executive power to pardon,
his desire for the restoration of state rights, and his support of the 
thirteenth amendment prompted churchmen to modify their 
estimate of the president. By the end of 1865 Johnson was described 
as an able administrator whose judicious policies were successfully 
reuniting the nation.\footnote{Ibid., May 31, July 19, December 20, 1865; The Wesleyan Methodist Magazine, 
December, 1865, p. 1131.}

Churchmen applauded the abolition of slavery and commended 
the ratification of the thirteenth amendment to the United States 
constitution. However, during the war some Methodists had ex­
pressed varied opinions about what should be the policy of 
Americans toward the Negroes. One Methodist spokesman 
suggested a policy of colonization similar to that expressed by 
Lincoln in 1862.\footnote{The Watchman, December 20, 1865; James M. McPherson, The Negro's Civic 
War, How American Negroes Felt and Acted During the War for the Union, Vintage 
tember 3, 1862.}

It was believed that the emancipation of large 
numbers of slaves would create many problems for American 
society. One proposed solution was to deport the blacks “to some 
territory outside of the United States,” preferably to their “native 
Africa.” Other Methodists, however, realized as did Lincoln before 
his death, the impracticality of any scheme to colonize or deport 
four million blacks and maintained that the Negroes must become a 
part of American society.\footnote{The Wesleyan Methodist Magazine, October, 1862, p. 929; The Watchman, 
September 3, 1862, December 23, 1863.}

It appears that by the end of the civil war no church spokesman 
espoused colonization. English Methodists acknowledged that the 
freedmen were Americans and that they should be accorded the 
same legal and judicial rights as other Americans. They asserted 
that the black code legislation enacted in some of the southern 
states in 1865-66, which prohibited Negroes from testifying in court 
against whites, excluded blacks from serving on juries, and forced 
freedmen into long term labor contracts were unjust and should be 
amended. Therefore, Methodists applauded the passage of the civil 
rights bill by congress in the spring of 1866. This measure bestowed 
citizenship upon the freedman and provided that citizens of every 
race and color were to have equal rights in all states to make con­
tracts, to sue, and to testify in court. Churchmen described the civil
rights bill as a "great act of justice."\textsuperscript{46}

The fourteenth amendment, which congress proposed and sent to the states for ratification in 1866, was described by the religious press as being "just and requisite." This amendment embodied the substance of the civil rights bill, limited the political rights of ex-Confederate office holders, and sought to persuade the southern states to extend the franchise to some blacks. Churchmen declared that this amendment would be "a wholesome inducement to southern whites" to educate the blacks and prepare them for greater responsibilities as citizens.\textsuperscript{47}

British Methodists reflected a cautious or conservative approach to the question of Negro suffrage. In the last year of the war Senator Charles Sumner of Massachusetts was denounced by the Methodist press for his espousal of Negro suffrage and "equality." The editor of the \textit{Watchman} asserted "we do not expect to see Negro suffrage in America in our time." It was exclaimed that to recommend Negro equality, including suffrage and intermarriage, was an "atrocious insult" to whites in all areas of the United States.\textsuperscript{48}

President Johnson maintained that each state should have the right to determine its own qualifications for suffrage. In the summer of 1865 some blacks in Mississippi requested that they be accorded the franchise. State officials ignored them and they appealed to the president for assistance. Johnson wrote to William L. Sharkey, the governor of Mississippi, and suggested the propriety of granting the franchise to those blacks who could read and write and who owned property valued for taxation purposes at approximately two hundred and fifty dollars.\textsuperscript{49}

Methodist spokesmen were in accord with these views and termed them moderate and just. Churchmen expressed the hope that Johnson could "draw congress" to support his suggestion of permitting the states to formulate suffrage requirements for their citizens. It was explained that the "mass of the Negroes were not

\textsuperscript{46} The \textit{Watchman}, April 25, 1866; \textit{The London Quarterly Review}, July, 1866, p. 314.

\textsuperscript{47} The \textit{Watchman}, October 17, 1866.

\textsuperscript{48} \textit{Ibid}., February 24, 1864.

yet fit to be entrusted with electoral privileges." The freedmen needed education and training to become responsible citizens. Churchmen were concerned that if Negro suffrage were forced upon the south it might precipitate further violence in a war-ravaged area.50

After the congressional elections in 1866, congress assumed control of reconstruction and declared that no valid or legitimate governments existed in the southern states (Tennessee excepted). Through a series of legislative enactments congress formulated a policy for restoring the states to the union. The congressional program involved the enfranchising of all adult male blacks and disfranchising those whites who had held any public office during the time of the Confederacy. The actions of congress increased tensions between that body and the executive branch of the government which climaxed in impeachment proceedings against Johnson in 1868. Churchmen expressed the opinion that the removal of the president from office by impeachment would "degrade the office of president." However, it was maintained that Johnson's "obstinacy" and his insistence upon a program which would "have fritted away" some of the most important gains of the war were responsible for the impeachment trials.51

British Methodists affirmed that the freedmen should be guaranteed the same legal rights as whites and that the Negroes should be educated for the responsibilities of citizenship and trained to become self-supporting and constructive members of society. Freedom for the blacks afforded an area of Christian service for churchmen in America and in England. British Methodists counseled their co-religionists in the United States that they had an obligation to help educate the freedmen and to "promote their spiritual and moral improvement."52 British Christians were also urged to support one of the freedom aid societies which were formed in various places in England during the closing months of the

50. The Watchman, November 8, December 20, 1865, March 21, October 17, 1866.
51. Ibid., March 11, 1868; The Wesleyan Methodist Magazine, February, 1867, p. 171, July, 1868, p. 651. Congress had passed the civil rights bill over Johnson's veto, the president had opposed the ratification of the fourteenth amendment, and he had acquiesced with the black codes.
52. Minutes of the Methodist Conferences, volume XVI [1865], p. 369.
war. In the autumn of 1864 the Methodist press published a plea for contributions to help establish schools and employ teachers for the freedom in America. Several months later this appeal for funds was repeated and it was explained that four million former slaves in America were still in "bondage to ignorance." At the meeting of the Methodist Conference in 1865, a resolution was adopted concerning freedmen aid. The resolution commended the "most seasonable and beneficial work" of the freedmen aid societies and recommended that local congregations support these societies by making contributions to them to help promote the welfare of the American freedmen.

Throughout the decade of the 1860s British Methodists exhibited a keen interest in American affairs. Although southern politicians were blamed for most of the tensions and violence of the period, English churchmen offered a theological explanation for the trials of American society. The sin of human slavery, it was asserted, was the basic cause of the sectional conflict and efforts to destroy the American republic. The suffering, death, misery, and devastation of four years of civil war were described as the judgment of Almighty God upon Americans for having abused and exploited millions of their fellow men. The military and political verdict of the war was viewed as the manifestation of Providence working in history. After the war ended churchmen advocated that the civil rights of freedmen be recognized. They commended the passage of the civil rights bill and the fourteenth amendment and favored extending the franchise to the literate blacks. Englishmen were requested to assist the education of the ex-slaves by making contributions to one of the societies formed in England and in

53. Prior to the end of the war a number of freedmen aid societies were formed by religious and philanthropic groups in the north and in England. They solicited funds and volunteers to help educate and train the ex-slaves for the responsibilities of free men.

54. The Wesleyan Methodist Magazine, October, 1864, p. 954; The Watchman, June 14, 1865; Minutes of the Methodist Conferences, volume XVI [1865], p. 349. The amount contributed to freedmen relief by Methodists is unknown. There is no official record of support. It appears that aid for freedmen was left to individual members and congregations, who channelled contributions to one of the societies established to solicit aid. The denomination never formed a society for freedman aid. see Christine Bolt, The Anti-Slavery Movement and Reconstruction, A Study in Anglo-American Co-Operation, 1833-77 (Oxford University Press for the Institute of Race Relations: London, 1969), pp. 87-88.
America by philanthropic individuals. Churchmen expressed confidence that since the United States was cleansed of the monumental evil, slavery, the nation would resume a normal course of development. It was believed that this development would be characterized by progressive and enlightened advancement and that the United States would soon become the great republic it was destined to be.  

55. See Minutes of the Methodist Conferences, volume XVI [1864], p. 152.